

## FOREWORD

Regional indicative forestry strategies (IFS) have been prepared in Scotland since the 1980's. The first were prepared for Caithness/Sutherland and the former Strathclyde Region but they now cover most of the Scottish land area. The earlier strategies had to respond to situations where rapid rates of conifer afforestation, variable standards of forest design and limited consultation had created tensions with other interests such as nature conservation. Things changed dramatically at the end of the 1980's when the Government revised the system of financial incentives for forestry, started producing (via the Forestry Commission) a raft of guidance on good practice, and threw its weight behind the preparation of regional IFS and their incorporation into Structure Plans. The period since then has seen considerable progress and refinement on all three of these fronts – incentives, design standards, and strategic planning. It has also seen much greater convergence of interests in forest and woodland development, and a decisive shift to a more holistic, sustainable approach.

Preparation of this forest and woodland strategy has the benefit of starting from a much stronger base and with more of a sense of common purpose. The latter has been helped by the increasing amount of partnership working on woodland initiatives and the production of the Scottish Forestry Strategy (presently under review). Responses to the Council's initial consultation document on key issues showed that low profit margins and import penetration are still a major concern for private sector timber producers. However, the trends mentioned above and the generally more stable policy climate today make for a promising future overall – particularly for the type of forests and woodlands which can play to Highland's strengths and deliver multiple benefits. There is substantial scope in the region to capitalise on this and develop a wide range of forest initiatives, including ones which are community-led.

This new strategy is intended to replace the one which was incorporated into the Highland regional Structure Plan in 1994. It is intended as a freestanding document to provide broad-brush guidance which can be fairly readily updated. It has some features which will be familiar from the old IFS but it is a major revision. As before, preparing it has been a complex task because it is a map-based strategy which involves the integration of many different spatial datasets and it has to take account of a wide range of interests. However, the Council has sought to develop the draft strategy on more of a partnership basis from the outset and has benefited from input from the Forestry Commission and other key agencies through a technical advisory group.

Alexander Park  
Chairman,  
Planning, Development, Europe and  
Tourism Committee  
Highland Council

John Rennilson  
Director of Planning & Development  
Highland Council

## CONTENTS

<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b>	4
<b>1. INTRODUCTION</b>	5
1.1 Background	5
1.2 The importance of forestry in Highland and its future prospects	5
1.3 The need for a regional forestry strategy	6
1.4 Changes in the wider policy context since the last IFS	6
1.5 Features of the revised strategy	7
<b>2. KEY PRINCIPLES</b>	9
2.1 Sustainability	9
2.2 Increase the community benefit from forests and woodlands	9
2.3 Identify opportunities for forest and woodland expansion	10
2.4 Improve existing forests/woodlands	10
2.5 Working with partners to address economic and infrastructure issues	10
2.6 Retain and enhance the level of funding for forestry in Highland	11
<b>3. AREA POLICY CLASSIFICATION</b>	12
<b>4. KEY THEMES AND PRIORITIES FOR IMPLEMENTATION</b>	14
<b>4.1 Forestry Industry Development</b>	14
4.1.1 Significant potential for productive forestry	14
4.1.2 Potential timber processing site	14
4.1.3 Local Processing	15
<b>4.2 Nature conservation</b>	15
4.2.1 Planting/Natural regeneration primarily for nature conservation and/or amenity	15
4.2.2 Priority areas for forest design improvements	15
4.2.3 Key areas of open landscape and habitat	15
<b>4.3 Community Development</b>	15
4.3.1 Local Partnerships	15
4.3.2 Community Forests	17
4.3.3 Woodlands in and around settlements	17
4.3.4 Favoured locations for local interpretive centres	17
<b>4.4 Agricultural diversification</b>	17
4.4.1 Priority areas for development of farm forestry	17
4.4.2 Crofter forestry	17
<b>4.5 Cultural Heritage</b>	18
4.5.1 Enhance and promote cultural heritage sites and landscapes	18
<b>4.6 Landscape improvement and conservation</b>	18
4.6.1 Landscape enhancement areas	18
4.6.2 Priority areas for forest design improvements	18
4.6.3 Designed Landscapes	18
4.6.4 Priority sites for screening/landscaping	18
<b>4.7 Recreation and Tourism</b>	19
4.7.1 Enhancement of major tourism corridors and long distance routes	19
4.7.2 Regional Woodland Park Potential	19
4.7.3 Mountain Biking Centres	19
<b>4.8 Transportation</b>	19
<b>4.9 Water management and fisheries</b>	20
4.9.1 Priority areas for riparian woodland development	20

<b>4.10 Potential themes for targeted funding</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>5. MONITORING AND REVIEW</b>	<b>20</b>
<b><i>Appendices:</i></b>	<b>21</b>
1. <i>Potential themes and actions for targeted funding</i>	22
2. <i>Strategic constraints and opportunities (table)</i>	24
3. <i>Water Bodies at Risk from Diffuse Pollution</i>	25
4. <i>List of organisations represented on the IFS Technical Group</i>	26
5. <i>Glossary of abbreviations</i>	27
6. <i>Bibliography</i>	28

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

*Forestry is one of the most important and extensive uses of land and well-designed woodlands can provide multiple benefits. The opportunities in Highland for developing new forests and woodlands and enhancing existing ones are wide-ranging. This strategy aims to maximise these opportunities and to guide development so that forestry and woodland management are well integrated with other interests. In doing so it aims to deliver the main elements of the national forestry strategy at a regional level.*

*The regional strategy has three main functions. Firstly, it identifies specific types of opportunity at the strategic level in key areas. Secondly it draws attention to types of forestry opportunity in Highland which merit consideration for targeted funding. Thirdly, it provides a framework for evaluating individual applications under the Scottish Forestry Grants Scheme and a context for the preparation of forest plans at district level and below.*

*The Council's strategic vision for forestry in Highland has six key principles. It seeks to:*

- **ensure sustainability**
- **increase the community benefit from forestry and woodlands;**
- **identify opportunities for forest and woodland expansion compatible with other interests;**
- **improve existing forests and woodlands to enhance forestry's contribution to the economy and environment of Highland;**
- **work with partners to address economic and infrastructure issues;**
- **retain and enhance the level of funding for forestry in Highland**

*The strategy is presented visually in the form of two complementary maps: one a policy map based on a composite assessment of area sensitivity; the other showing key themes and priorities for implementation. The methodology for the assessment of area sensitivity and the policy categories have been revised to better reflect modern standards in forestry practice and the range of opportunities in Highland; also to make preferred outcomes clearer. Design standards and species choice have improved generally since the IFS was produced, making it feasible for a larger area of the region to now come within the less-constrained category.*

*Key themes which the strategy advocates as the basis for targeted funding are:*

1. **measures to increase community benefits from forests** – there is increasing recognition of the important role that local communities/partnerships offer through the management of the forest and woodland resource in securing both local and wider socio-economic and environmental gains, expansion and development of woodlands around settlements, crofter forestry;
2. **enhancement of the region's attractiveness for tourism and recreation** via woodland development - enhancement of important tourist routes, archaeological sites, and paths; forest design improvements in selected areas and establishment of woodland interpretive centres;
3. **expansion of native woodland**, particularly in areas of higher natural heritage value or important areas for recreation – via development of forest habitat networks and implementation of LBAP's, area initiatives such as Sunart Oakwoods, and schemes to re-instate and expand riparian, tree-line, and coastal woodland;
4. **expansion of productive forest** – both in terms of establishing new woodlands geared to timber production in the less-constrained areas of the region and improvement of the species range and timber quality of specific species in certain broad locations;
5. **improvement of the infrastructure for forestry and local processing** - identification of priority road and bridge improvements, opportunities for increased rail and ship usage for timber transport, and development of local processing capacity and woodfuel supply chains.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Highland is recognised internationally for the quality of its scenery and natural heritage. Forests and woodlands are integral to this and will play an increasingly important role in sustaining that international reputation. Our vision is that the Highland landscape and environment will support a woodland resource that meets the needs and aspirations of our communities. This strategy therefore aims first and foremost to encourage the right sort of forestry and woodland in the right places. It seeks to build synergy between forestry and other interests which can benefit from woodlands – local communities, tourism and recreation interests, nature conservation, and farmers and crofters seeking to diversify.

### 1.1 Background

The Highland Forest and Woodland Strategy (HFWS) updates and replaces the first Highland Indicative Forestry Strategy (IFS1) which was published in 1994 and incorporated into the Highland Structure Plan. The main purpose of the strategy, as before, is to guide the development and management of forests and woodlands in the Highland region so they will integrate well with other interests and generate maximum benefit for the local community, economy, and environment. The intended lifespan of this strategy is ten years.

The strategy incorporates a number of new features which are described below. The process of preparation has also been different from its predecessor. The Council has sought to develop the new strategy on a partnership basis from the outset, by convening a technical advisory group made up of representatives from key forestry and land use interests. It has also canvassed public opinion early on by publishing a consultative report on key issues for the new strategy which was based on work by the technical group. The aspirations for forestry in Highland which this consultation revealed were diverse. Overall however, they showed a greater convergence of interest than ten years ago. The strategy aims to develop this convergence of interest and exploit the wide range of opportunities which exist in Highland: (a) to help deliver the vision of the Scottish Forestry Strategy at regional level, (b) to provide guidance for forestry frameworks and individual forest plans and (c) to maximise the benefits to Highland of the Scottish Forestry Grant Scheme and complementary funding sources.

### 1.2 The importance of forestry in Highland and its future prospects

Forestry is one of the most extensive uses of land in Highland and woodland covers 15% of the land area. The region also notably holds 85% of the UK's resource of native pine woodlands. In managing this and other priority habitats, forestry plays a key role in contributing to the UK Biodiversity Action Plan. Forestry is an important source of employment with woodland management and timber processing providing the equivalent of just under 2000 full-time jobs. Most of the planting in the post-war period - right up to the late 1980's - was devoted to production of timber from fast-growing conifers. In recent decades however, the balance has shifted towards restoration and expansion of the historically depleted native woodland resource and managing the existing resource to deliver multiple benefits. In the process, forestry practice has become much more wide-ranging and responsive to the need for sustainable development, conservation of biodiversity, recreational interests and landscape enhancement. The role of forests and woodlands to the Scottish tourism industry (currently worth £4.5 billion per year) is becoming more clearly recognised. Landscape value and recreational opportunities are key attractions for tourists, with the Highlands being a key destination.

Well-managed woodland is truly a renewable and multi-benefit resource, offering a mix of economic, recreational, tourism, landscape and nature conservation benefits. It also has a role in soil fertility and stabilisation of run-off and water supplies. The economic benefits of forestry are most noticeable in the inner Moray Firth area, Strathspey, and around Fort William, where the main offices, sawmills and timber processors are found (*see Figure 1*). Equally importantly, it

generates employment on a more dispersed basis to some of the more remote parts of the Highland area. The centre of gravity of new forestry activity in Highland moved north and west in the post-war period and whilst this trend may have slowed there is no reason to believe it will reverse as more crofters and communities become involved in woodland management. Town and village-dwellers also stand to gain from the expansion and restructuring of the woodland resource as opportunities arise to enhance the setting of their settlements and opportunities for outdoor recreation.

In a region which is often associated in the public mind with bare hills and empty glens, woodland is an important, enlivening visual feature which can clothe the landscape. At the same time, in and around urban areas, it is a civilizing feature which softens the hard edges of the built environment. In either case, if well planned and managed it strengthens the image of Highland as a place to live and visit.

### **1.3 The need for a regional forestry strategy**

There are many different public and private agendas for forest and woodland development but an indicative strategy at regional level provides a tool for long-term planning on a large scale. Whilst the national forestry strategy sets out the overall vision and policy tone, a regional strategy helps to translate this into local priorities suited to the character and geography of the territory in question. It does this at a level where many strategic decisions about infrastructure and service provision are taken as well as decisions about the framework for local planning policy and economic development. It can therefore integrate a range of different policy strands/initiatives in a meaningful, place-specific way. In doing so, it provides a context for plans at a more local level which must respond to the circumstances of site conditions, access, and user demands. Such plans range from FCS Strategic Forest Plans to design plans for individual forests.

Other benefits of an effective regional forestry strategy are that it can:

- help to reconcile conflicting perspectives and aspirations
- help to attract additional, targeted incentives for private sector forestry and community-led initiatives
- provide a measure of certainty and confidence for investors
- raise public awareness of the multi-faceted value of the forest and woodland resource
- guide the Council and the Forestry Commission in appraising grant applications
- help to increase the success rate of grant applications by alerting forest developers to the key strategic issues and priorities in each area

### **1.4 Changes in the wider policy context since the last IFS**

There have been substantial changes in the wider policy context since the IFS was prepared. The Scottish Office produced new guidance on the preparation of indicative forestry strategies in 1999 which drew on the experience of the first round of IFS's and responded to the broadening base of forestry practice which developed with the advent of the Woodland Grant Scheme and the SFGS. A suite of good practice guidelines have provided benchmarks for improvements in forest design standards and their influence has been consolidated by the introduction of the UK Forestry Standard (1998) and the development of certification schemes.

A new Structure Plan for Highland was published in 2001. This puts much greater emphasis on sustainable development and design for sustainability than before. Community planning which emphasises inter-agency working and joint delivery of a broad social agenda has come to the fore. The evolving Scottish Forestry Strategy has been followed up by the development of a consultation infrastructure, including regional forest fora, to take it forward. Another key mechanism for taking the strategy forward – the Scottish Forestry Grant Scheme (SFGS) – was introduced in 2003. This increased elements of grant aid which were already becoming significant in the later phases of the Woodland Grant Scheme, makes allowance for special locational

supplements, and offers higher levels of grant for native woodland schemes which help to consolidate and expand Forest Habitat Networks.

Along with the shifts in forestry policy and the broader moves towards devolved government there has been a refocusing of the Forestry Commission's role and a review of its land ownership has recently taken place. This review has recently led to the National Forest Land Scheme which allows for community acquisition, and provision for affordable housing. This is therefore an opportune time for the Council to review and update its indicative forestry strategy – to consider the type of forests and woodlands Highland communities need, and the importance of involving local communities in decisions on their management.

There have also been a range of policy developments in other sectors which are relevant to the objectives and conduct of forestry practice. These include the introduction of the *Natura* site network (Special Areas for Conservation and Special Protection Areas) and increasing attention to biodiversity, CAP reform, National Parks, deer management, and land reform which is encouraging the growth of community forest initiatives. The Cairngorms National Park Authority has started work on a local woodland strategy as part of the process of preparing its park plan. Lastly, there is a growing European dimension to forestry policy and funding which is likely to encourage wider exchange of experience, innovation and international partnership working.

## 1.5 Features of the revised strategy

Key features of the new forest and woodland strategy are:

- **assessments of technical land capability for different types of woodland are now based on the Forestry Commission's ESC data** – this recognises the potential for development of certain types of woodland in areas which were formerly identified as "unsuitable for trees" and pays closer regard to the growth potential for specific groups of tree species;
- **a revised assessment of opportunities and constraints** based on updated information and a revision of the sieve mapping methodology which was used in IFS1;
- **revised policy categories**, based on the SDD recommendations in Circular 9/1999 but re-labeled and subdivided where appropriate to indicated desired outcomes more clearly and to emphasise the range of opportunities for forest and woodland development in Highland;
- **refinement of the key themes and priorities for implementation** to provide more detailed guidance on what the IFS seeks to achieve and to link more closely to initiatives by partner agencies
- **identification of special areas of opportunity** which could attract targeted funding through SFGS grant aid or complementary sources of funding
- **policy maps compiled and made available in electronic form** – to make the strategy easier to use by relevant agencies and forestry companies and easier to update

[INSERT FORESTRY INDUSTRY MAP (FIGURE 1)]

## 2. KEY PRINCIPLES

The key principles underlying the previous IFS were: play to the region's strengths; plan for 21<sup>st</sup> century needs; forestry as a means of rural development; ecological sustainability; add value to Highland forests and products to maximise local benefits; balance constraint with opportunity. These also largely underpin the new strategy but there is a need now to be more action-focused. Six key principles therefore underlie the strategic vision for forestry in Highland:

1. **ensure sustainability**
2. **increase the community benefit from forestry and woodlands**
3. **identify opportunities for forest and woodland expansion** compatible with other interests recognising the importance of helping to improve the continuity of timber supply
4. **improve existing forests and woodlands to deliver multiple benefits** and enhance forestry's contribution to the economy and environment of Highland
5. **work with partners to address economic and infrastructure issues** and maximise returns on infrastructure investment
6. **retain and enhance the level of funding for forestry in Highland** - help to target this effectively

These principles reflect the strategic directions of the present Scottish Forestry Strategy, developing its priorities for action at the regional level. With the Scottish Forestry Strategy now under review, the HFWS reflects a local emphasis on these priorities, reflecting strategic regional needs and local opportunities.

### 2.1. Sustainability

The principle of sustainable development is now at the heart of national forestry policy. The Council's policy in relation to forestry therefore seeks to:

- ensure community consultation and engagement
- guide different types of forest and woodland development to appropriate areas
- encourage appropriate management of existing forests and woodlands
- develop Forest Habitat Networks
- encourage alternatives to clear felling to support nature conservation, employment and recreation interests
- encouraging appropriate sustainable measures to reduce overgrazing in line with the Joint Statement on Deer Fencing
- safeguard cultural heritage sites

### 2.2. Increase the Community Benefit from Forestry and Woodlands

Two of the five strategic directions of the Scottish Forestry Strategy relate directly to this principle. Forestry has been shown to be an effective catalyst in capacity building and providing opportunities for community betterment, including sustainable rural development, environmental, biodiversity, health and training. Many good examples of community managed woodlands exist in Highland. Creating opportunities for more people to enjoy trees, woods and forests, can be achieved in several ways. A major contribution can be achieved through the creation of new woodlands in and around settlements as well as management of, and linkage between existing areas. The HFWS supports these by:

- recognising the significant benefits that community initiatives can secure for local communities and wider social, economic and environmental objectives
- working to build community capacity through skills, infrastructure, employment, and downstream benefits - forestry as a force for rural development - and supporting

- community-led initiatives and ownership where this will bring local and public benefits
- identifying areas with potential for development as new community woodlands around settlements
- emphasising the importance of public consultation in realising the multiple benefits from forestry and woodland schemes
- recognising the cultural and spiritual benefits that woodland contributes to the wellbeing of people living and working in Highland
- recognising the importance of safeguarding, managing and promoting policy woodland

### **2.3. Identify Opportunities for Woodland Expansion**

One of the strategic directions of the Scottish Forestry Strategy (SFS) is to *"create a diverse forest resource of high quality that will contribute to the economic needs of Scotland throughout the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and beyond."* Its priorities for action include expanding the area of well-designed productive forest and developing more mixed forests. Another key aim of the SFS is *"to ensure that Scotland's trees, woods and forests make a positive contribution to the environment"* and a priority action under this heading is to extend and enhance native woodlands by developing Forest Habitat Networks. The Highland Forest and Woodland Strategy contributes to these aims by identifying opportunities for:

- planting productive woodland in marginal farming areas
- new native woodlands to improve habitat networks
- farm and crofter forestry to further diversification
- planting of new community woodlands around settlements
- riparian woodland schemes to improve water quality; flood control; river fishings, biodiversity
- amenity planting to enhance landscape character

### **2.4. Improve Existing Forests and Woodlands to Deliver Multiple Benefits**

The strategy can help to create a diverse forest resource and ensure that forestry makes a positive contribution to the economy and the environment by providing a strategic planning framework for FE Forest Design Plans and private sector Long Term Forest Plans. It supports the improvement of existing forests and woodland in Highland by:

- encouraging restructuring of even-aged, first-generation plantation forests which have limited species range at present;
- encouraging native woodland planting and restocking which contribute to UKBAP targets
- encouraging management to safeguard our cultural heritage
- supporting management for timber quality
- identifying priority areas for native woodland restoration
- identifying areas of strategic tourism importance
- identifying forest areas with the potential for development of regional woodland parks
- highlighting areas of high landscape or cultural sensitivity

### **2.5. Working with Partners to Address Economic and Infrastructure Issues**

The fifth key aim of the Scottish Forestry Strategy is to *"maximise the value to the Scottish economy of the wood resource becoming available over the next 20 years."* At the national level, this is mainly industry-focused, with priority actions to encourage product development and to improve the timber transport infrastructure. The Council will support these aims by:

- identifying opportunities for development of new, small-scale timber-processing facilities which could meet specific local needs, e.g. wood fuel, fencing, building materials
- prioritising areas for new planting of productive woodland which are adequately supported

- by transport links
- identifying forests constrained by poor transport infrastructure and working to provide solutions for dealing with these
- supporting the Highland Timber Transport Group in optimising the existing infrastructure for timber haulage
- pressing for additional government support for transport improvements including wider use of ship and rail

## **2.6. Retain and Enhance the Level of Funding for Forestry in Highland - Help to Target this Effectively**

Highland has benefited substantially from grant aid for new forest and woodland developments by virtue of its large area and the substantial opportunities for native woodland regeneration. However, much still remains to be done and with discretionary funding becoming more important at both the national and local level there is a need to identify specific opportunities and needs which justify top-up funding. There is a risk that many small Highland communities may be disadvantaged if they fall below the population threshold which is used to justify additional funding for certain types of community woodland. The relatively high cost of taking timber to market from remoter parts of the Highlands also squeezes profit margins or can even sometimes makes it unprofitable. Highland must therefore not only aim to sustain a continued healthy level of forestry activity and maximise the uptake of SFGS opportunities, it must continue to play to its particular strengths. It can do this by identifying development opportunities for specific types of forest/woodland in specific locations which might attract enhanced levels of funding, eg:

- productive forestry in areas with relatively few strategic constraints
- habitat for endangered species
- woodland development which enhances the setting of ancient monuments and other historical sites
- enhancement of key long-distance walking routes and access routes to popular hills
- restoration of native woodland
- restructuring of existing forests to deliver landscape and other benefits

### 3. AREA POLICY CLASSIFICATION

The spatial basis of the HFWS has been derived from a systematic assessment of strategic constraints and opportunities across the region. The ideal would be to distil all this information into a single policy map for Highland. In practice however it is virtually impossible to do this in a way which would do justice to the wide range of interests involved. Levels of strategic *constraint* lend themselves better to sieve mapping because they are often based on formal area designations or river catchment boundaries which are relatively easy to define. Strategic *opportunities*, on the other hand, can be identified in broad-brush terms but they are more difficult to define in terms of boundaries without detailed work at local level. Outwith the obvious "accessibility corridors" in the region which are served by good roads, the strategic opportunities often involve specific, scattered sites which show up as points on a map of Highland rather than areas. Examples of these are sites which have the potential to be developed as community woodlands or regional woodland parks. Even where very broad areas are involved the potential may be diffuse and difficult to pin down on a map, e.g. in the case of areas of marginal farmland which indicate higher than average potential for farm forestry. The real potential will depend on local factors, such as farm structure and land values.

For these reasons the spatial basis of the HFWS is presented in two maps: the **policy map** which classifies all areas of the region by their relative sensitivity and suitability for different types of woodland, and the **key themes map**. The policy map (*Figure 2*) is intended to provide a strategic policy context for evaluating SFGS proposals and guiding the preparation of Long Term Forest Plans and Forest Design Plans. It applies to both unplanted land and existing woodland areas. Four policy categories have been used:

- **A - areas suitable for all types of woodland scheme which respect local circumstances, particularly the aspirations of local communities/partnerships, and meet current FCS design criteria and guidelines**

*[this broadly corresponds to the category which was formerly known as "Preferred" and is based on areas where either no strategic constraints or only diffuse, tertiary-level constraints were identified]*

- **B - preference for a mixed woodland mosaic with retention of a substantial open space element within the relevant landscape character zone(s)**

*[this broadly corresponds to the category formerly known as "Potential" and is based on areas where secondary strategic constraints were identified, such as National Scenic Areas and proposed Areas of Great Landscape Value]*

- **C - planting primarily for nature conservation and/or amenity**
- **D – limited potential for sensitive woodland development with preference for large-scale open space**

*[these two categories together correspond broadly to the category formerly known as "Sensitive" and are based on areas where primary constraints were identified, such as Special Areas for Conservation or remote landscapes of value for recreation. The category 'D' areas are ones where the lack of extensive woodland cover is an integral part of their landscape character and dramatic appeal (eg Rannoch Moor and Glencoe) or their special nature conservation interest as extensive peatlands]*

The datasets used in the preparation of this sieve map and the relative weighting given to each is detailed in **Appendix 2**. The policy map is available in electronic form on request from the Planning & Development Service.

[INSERT POLICY MAP (FIGURE 2)]

## **4. KEY THEMES AND PRIORITIES FOR IMPLEMENTATION**

*Figure 3* shows in diagrammatic form the main thematic strands of the strategy. It is derived partly from the policy map, and partly from the series of topic maps which have been produced to inform the strategy. The paragraphs following identify these key themes and enlarge on their strategic priorities for implementation. Sample locations are given to provide a geographical or physical reference; these should not be read as an exclusive or exhaustive list of options. As befits an area with the size and diversity of Highland, this is a strategy which offers opportunities for development of a wide range of forest and woodland types as well as safeguarding the integrity of key natural heritage assets. The extent and local expression of these priorities will depend upon close co-operation between local stakeholders and the relevant statutory agencies.

The total area identified as having significant potential for productive forestry is substantially larger than it was in IFS1. This recognises the fact that improved forest design standards have made a wider range of locations appropriate and the definition of what constitutes productive forestry is now broader than it was. The more sensitive parts of the region in natural heritage terms are highlighted as areas where planting should be primarily for nature conservation and/or amenity or where important open landscapes should be retained.

In addition, several new themes have been added to those which featured in IFS1. Perhaps the most significant is the emerging potential for community forestry initiatives. The Highlands are particularly well placed to serve these opportunities, delivering both local and wider socio-economic and environmental benefits. The major road-based tourist route corridors are indicated as before because they represent special areas of both opportunity and constraint. The major long-distance routes are also important corridors in their own right, which can be enhanced by sensitive woodland development and which can generate tourist income for communities nearby. Riparian woodland is another important priority with obvious habitat and landscape benefits. Rail and marine transport modes available for timber transport are also highlighted because of the need to minimise pressure on the road network and allow management of remote forests.

### **4.1 Forestry Industry Development**

#### **4.1.1 Significant potential for productive forestry**

The broad areas identified as having significant potential for productive forestry are derived from the policy category 'A' areas with no strategic constraints or only tertiary-level constraints. However, the former exclude some of the category 'A' areas on the West Coast where site conditions are less amenable due to exposure and thin soils, and where the infrastructure for timber harvesting is less well developed. There is significant potential for large scale planting of a range of productive species in areas within agreed route catchments or in areas with appropriate transshipment links such as south Sutherland, the Strath of Kildonan, and the north of Skye.

Consolidation of existing forest areas, improving the timber quality of specific species in certain broad locations, and expansion of farm woodlands with species suited to site conditions and markets, offer further prospects for expanding areas of productive forest.

#### **4.1.2 Potential timber processing site**

Projected increases in the annual production of Sitka spruce provide opportunities for investment in larger scale processing. Development of an integrated plant at Delny, Invergordon - a site previously identified by the Forest Industries Cluster Group and HIE - is being actively pursued.

### **4.1.3 Local processing**

With the forecasted increases in production coming on stream, there are opportunities to add value locally to all grades of timber, whether by conversion into established sawn products for local markets, or in the manufacture of new products for wider distribution. This will provide increased local employment, reduce timber transport impacts and encourage management of the resource.

## **4.2 Nature Conservation**

### **4.2.1 Planting/natural regeneration primarily for nature conservation and/or amenity**

Planting and natural regeneration primarily for nature conservation and/or amenity is encouraged in areas classified as category 'C' in the policy map, ie areas with primary constraints but outwith the key areas of open landscape and habitat identified as category 'D'. Within certain category 'C' areas there are currently some extensive plantations of non-native conifers. Restructuring these plantations over time to integrate them better with the natural heritage value of their surroundings will be important. However local socio-economic considerations also need to be taken into account when considering the restructuring options on specific sites.

Opportunities to create new 'nodes' of native woodland, and to link up and expand existing native woodlands, exist in areas such as north and north west Sutherland, Arisaig- Knoydart and Loch Eil/Loch Lochy. Forthcoming advice from FCS and SNH on Forest Habitat Networks will allow development of a range of native woodland types including riparian, tree-line, and coastal woodland which will contribute to an improving network. Deer management is seen as crucial in certain areas to allow such woodland expansion. Deer management groups and application of the DCS guidance on best practice will play an important role in this.

### **4.2.2 Priority areas for forest design improvements**

Within the ongoing process of restructuring even-aged plantations, there are opportunities to improve particular nature conservation design elements at a number of locations outwith designated sites, and building on present restoration of ancient woodland on sites which have seen the development of plantation forest. Examples include Truderscaig and Guisachan.

### **4.2.3 Key areas of open landscape and habitat**

Key areas of open landscape and habitat are derived from Category 'D' policy areas, where there is a preference for retention of large-scale open space (eg Rannoch Moor, Dava Moor). These areas were identified as part of the landscape appraisal used in IFS1 and also include areas which are nationally or internationally designated peatland conservation sites.

## **4.3 Community Development**

### **4.3.1 Local partnerships**

Public/private partnerships, such as the Sunart Oakwood Initiative, are proven vehicles for facilitating wide-ranging benefits. Non-statutory and statutory agencies including the CWA and community councils, FCS, SNH and HIE should continue to seek out further partnerships to deliver local priorities.

[INSERT KEY THEMES MAP (FIGURE 3)]

### **4.3.2 Community forests**

Community forests are becoming more important and developments like these at Abriachan and Culag are delivering significant public and community benefits. These include partnership working, employment and new skills, local timber utilisation, recreation, amenity, and education. The strategy supports initiatives to develop community development where the desire for involvement in forestry exists. The launch of the National Forest Land Scheme is an important development and should lead to an increasing interest in community-based initiatives focusing on providing increased public benefits and opportunities for affordable housing.

### **4.3.3 Woodlands in and around settlements**

The Key Themes and Priorities map identifies settlements with more than 2,000 inhabitants (currently eligible for Woodland In and Around Towns supplement) as well as a number of smaller appropriate settlements. Woodland creation and management around towns and villages can improve their character and setting while providing opportunity for community participation. Development of woodlands around settlements provides greater access opportunities and may enhance Core Path Networks.

### **4.3.4 Favoured locations for woodland interpretive centres**

These are areas with a substantial existing woodland resource where interpretation facilities would enhance the existing tourism and recreational base have been identified in locations such as Salen, Cannich and Strome. Creation of these centres brings an increased public awareness of the benefits of forestry and provides a local resource for business and learning activities.

## **4.4 Agricultural Diversification**

CAP reform and restructuring of the farming industry provide significant opportunities for diversification into woodland creation and management. The forthcoming Rural Development Regulations, and revisions to the SFGS and introduction of Land Management Contracts, will allow greater integration of farming and forestry.

### **4.4.1 Priority areas for development of farm forestry**

These areas of the region have been identified on the basis of intermediate land capability for agriculture (LCA), ie classes 3.2 – 5.3. This range extends from average quality arable land to land capable of use as improved grassland but only at low stock densities. Opportunities exist in such areas to better integrate farm woodlands into farm holdings and to provide benefits in shelter and sporting management. There are also opportunities to conserve biodiversity by adding value to farm woodlands, developing woodland grazing regimes, and by creating energy from farm woodlands. A range of woodland types in suitable locations (in Caithness and the Inner Moray Firth particularly) are possible, from shelterbelts, copses and native woodlands to well designed productive woodland.

### **4.4.2 Crofter forestry**

The areas identified on the Key Themes map are core areas of crofting tenure. Consolidating the successes of Crofter Forestry is a major priority, both in the enhancement of existing crofting woodlands, and in the expansion of crofter forestry projects in Sutherland, Skye and Wester Ross. There is continuing scope for larger scale initiatives.

## **4.5 Cultural Heritage**

### **4.5.1 Enhance and promote cultural heritage sites and landscapes**

Cultural heritage sites and landscapes can contribute to community identity, and can be valuable economic resources for local communities in terms of tourism. Forest management can play a role in the identification and development of management and interpretation of sites, e.g. Yarrows, The Ord.

Nationally important cultural heritage sites and landscapes are unlikely to be compatible with new planting or regeneration unless research identifies the land use at the period of interest as being woodland. Regionally and locally important sites (e.g. Fort George, Ruthven Barracks) should be safeguarded from planting and regeneration with FC guidelines as a minimum.

There are opportunities to improve the setting of important cultural heritage sites and landscapes through the removal of regeneration or past planting, for example at Camster and Applecross. Equally, cultural heritage sites and landscapes could be enhanced by restoring woodland where the historical evidence indicates that this was present during the life of the sites, as found with a number in Sunart.

## **4.6 Landscape Improvement and Conservation**

### **4.6.1 Landscape enhancement areas**

These are areas identified as lacking in woodland cover at present, and which would particularly benefit in landscape terms from tree planting or natural regeneration, for example Strathnaver, Glen Quoich and Blackwater Reservoir. Detailed landscape design guidance, based on an assessment of the major landscape character tracts, is available from Scottish Natural Heritage.

### **4.6.2 Priority areas for forest design improvements**

Within the ongoing process of restructuring even-aged plantations, there are opportunities to improve particular landscape design elements at a number of locations including Altnabreac, Garbat and Broadford.

### **4.6.3 Designed Landscapes**

Sites identified in the Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes (HS/SNH 1988 and 2003 supplement) are shown on the map. Many designed landscapes, such as Eilean Shona (Loch Moidart) and Beaufort near Beaully have a significant woodland element. Securing the appropriate management of these features is a priority to maintain the cultural and tourism benefits they provide. There are also notable policy woods, not included in the Inventory, where active management to secure their landscape and cultural value is a priority, as at Belladrum. Potentially this could be achieved through Long Term Forest Plans.

### **4.6.4 Priority sites for screening/landscaping**

These are mainly prominent quarry sites as well as certain other industrial operations in visually exposed locations, where planting to lessen the visual impact would bring landscape benefits.

## **4.7 Recreation and Tourism**

Tourism is a mainstay of the Highland rural economy but the international market in which it has to operate is a highly competitive one. The landscape, culture and outdoor recreation opportunities of the region are key attractions for visitors but there is scope for improvement. Attention to the role of forestry in enhancing key routes and sites of interest is key. It also adds to the quality of life of residents and makes the region a more attractive place for investment. In light of recent changes to access legislation, work is progressing on development of a Core Path network for Highland and this is due to be completed in 2008.

### **4.7.1 Enhancement of major tourism corridors and long distance routes**

There are a number of important tourism transport corridors and recreation routes in Highland. These include the road routes of the A9 through Strathspey, the Great Glen, Invergarry to Skye, and Inverness to Ullapool, and the designated Long Distance Routes of the West Highland, Great Glen and Speyside Ways. In a sense these are showcases for the region. There are opportunities here to develop new and existing woodlands which enhance the visitor experience, either through landscape design or further recreational provision. Similarly, along other known cross-country routes there are opportunities for enhancement via appropriate woodland development and management. It is important that forestry developments in the vicinity of these routes take account of the need to safeguard and in some cases open up key views, as on the A82 at Loch Ness side. It is also important that good existing views from other road routes (eg Struie) are kept open. Furthermore, there are opportunities to restore views which have been lost through tree growth (eg above Fort Augustus on the south side of Loch Ness).

### **4.7.2 Regional woodland park potential**

These have been identified within areas with substantial forest presence but little formal recreational provision, which coincide with good access and high levels of visitor interest such as Ardverikie, Morvern, and Achnashellach.

### **4.7.3 Mountain biking centres**

Local initiatives to create mountain biking trails in forests have resulted in centres being developed at Learnie on the Black Isle, Aonach Mor, Laggan, and Balnain (Glen Urquhart). These are a good example of how partnerships can provide a facility for informal and formal recreation while promoting wider recreational use. Promotion of these centres benefits a range of local service suppliers.

## **4.8 Transportation**

Highland's extensive and often remote transportation network is a challenge to both develop and maintain. However, it has an important bearing on the viability of some areas for productive forestry. Priorities are road and bridge improvements to support timber harvesting, areas where increased rail freight or ship usage can relieve pressure on the road network, and areas where the development of local processing capacity and woodfuel supply chains can help to add value to otherwise marginal existing woodlands. Projects through the Freight Facilities Grant, the Timber Transport Fund and renewable energy initiatives are welcomed. Ongoing support to transport solutions at a national level is key to securing multiple benefits from the forest resource.

## **4.9 Water Management and Fisheries**

### **4.9.1 Priority areas for riparian woodland development**

There is increasing activity to enhance and restore the productivity of river systems by riparian planting and regeneration. This can have important benefits for biodiversity, game fisheries, flood and erosion control, and the landscape. The strategy identifies priority areas for riparian woodland development in catchments which are particularly lacking in woodland cover due to overgrazing from domestic livestock and deer (such as that of the River Dessary). Other priorities are catchments with headwater erosion/flooding problems (eg the upper Findhorn); the upper/middle reaches of key game fishing rivers such as the Helmsdale; rivers adjacent to intensive farmland, such as the Spey, and riverine SACs such as the Thurso and Conon.

Implementation of the Water Framework Directive will have implications for the creation and restocking of existing woodlands. SEPA cites diffuse pollution from forestry activities as the reason for classifying 12 water bodies in the region as "at risk". These are identified in Appendix 3.

## **4.10 Potential themes for targeted funding**

The Council has identified a number of themes which it believes would justify targeted funding. These are:

- 1. measures to increase community benefits from forests**
- 2. enhancement of the region's attractiveness for tourism and recreation**
- 3. expansion of native woodland via Forest Habitat Networks**
- 4. expansion of productive forest**
- 5. improvement of the infrastructure for forestry and local processing**

Further detail on these themes and relevant actions which could support them is given in Appendix 1.

## **5. MONITORING AND REVIEW**

Various agencies have stressed the importance of sustaining the Highland Forest and Woodland Strategy as an accurate, living document. Monitoring and review will be important and the new digital GIS base prepared for the HFWS should make this process, and the issuing of future updates, easier. For example, the forthcoming FCS advice on Forest Habitat Networks will be added as an additional layer of detail to the strategy. This emphasizes the importance of other agencies working with the Council to provide update information on a regular basis. The Highland Forestry Forum (HFF) is expected to generate new approaches and initiatives and these should inform further updates of the strategy.

Key indicators which will be used to monitor the effectiveness of the strategy will include:

- the number, type, distribution and approval rate of SFGS applications
- use made of the regional strategy by SFGS applicants
- use made of the strategy in FCS Forest Design Plans and private sector Long Term Forest Plans
- development and uptake of targeted initiatives
- implementation of HFWS priorities through the Highland Forestry Forum

## **APPENDICES**

**APPENDIX 1:**

**POTENTIAL THEMES AND ACTIONS FOR TARGETED FUNDING**

Five key themes are proposed for specific targeted support at this time. Under each theme, specific priorities and actions are listed. **Where specific sites are given these should be read as examples only, and should not be considered exhaustive.**

The Highland Forestry Forum is expected to be an important platform in supporting and promoting priorities at a regional and national level.

<b><i>THEME 1 – INCREASING COMMUNITY BENEFITS</i></b>	<b><i>ACTION</i></b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support community ownership/management where this will bring local and public benefits</li> <li>• Affordable housing opportunities</li> <li>• Maximise non-timber outputs and benefits</li> <li>• Increase opportunities for community consultation</li> <li>• Expansion and management of woodlands around settlements</li> <li>• Expand area of crofter forestry</li> <li>• Expand educational role – ‘Forest School’</li> </ul>	<p>Community Woodland Association</p> <p>‘Fragile’ housing areas National Forest Land Scheme</p> <p>FCS/HC/Community Councils</p> <p>‘WIAT’ grant scheme currently in place. Enrichment of existing forestry schemes. Target low activity areas.</p> <p>FCS</p>
<b><i>THEME 2 – INCREASING TOURISM AND RECREATION BENEFITS</i></b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enhancement of major tourist road corridors</li> <li>• Establishment of Regional Woodland Forest Parks</li> <li>• Enhancement of policy and farm woodlands and heritage trees</li> <li>• Restoration of cultural landscapes</li> <li>• Enhancement of long distance routes</li> <li>• Encourage alternatives to clear felling</li> <li>• Priorities for forest design improvement</li> <li>• Establishment of Interpretive Centres and related facilities</li> <li>• Mountain Biking Centres</li> </ul>	<p>A9 (Strathspey) Great Glen Inverness/Ullapool</p> <p>Achnashellach, Golspie</p> <p>Inventory of Designed Landscapes, TPO's, Development Plans HC Archaeology Unit</p> <p>Great Glen Way, Speyside Way, West Highland Way FCS/FTA</p> <p>Altnabreac, Garbat, Broadford</p> <p>Cannich, Salen, Strome</p> <p>Strathpeffer, Golspie, Borgie</p>

<b><i>THEME 3 – EXPANSION OF NATIVE WOODLAND</i></b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Extend and enhance native woodlands by developing Forest Habitat Networks</i></li> <li>• <i>Improve catchment management and riparian habitat</i></li> <li>• <i>Area initiatives</i></li> <li>• <i>Expand treeline and coastal edge woodland</i></li> <li>• <i>Promote LBAP priorities</i></li> <li>• <i>Deer Management</i></li> </ul>	<p><i>FHN Maps (FCS/SNH)</i></p> <p><i>Riverine SAC's (Thurso/Conon), River Dessary, Upper Findhorn</i></p> <p><i>Sunart Oakwood Initiative</i></p> <p><i>Cairngorms, Skye, Morvern</i></p> <p><i>Action Plans</i></p> <p><i>Areas of high impact</i></p>
<b><i>THEME 4 – EXPANSION OF PRODUCTIVE FOREST</i></b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Expand the area of well designed productive forest</i></li> <li>• <i>Expand range of productive species in suitable locations</i></li> <li>• <i>Improving timber quality of Scots pine</i></li> <li>• <i>Expand the area of productive broadleaved planting (native and non-native)</i></li> <li>• <i>Farm woodlands</i></li> </ul>	<p><i>Policy Category A</i></p> <p><i>Policy Category B</i></p> <p><i>Badenoch &amp; Strathspey</i></p> <p><i>Caithness, E. Ross, Nairnshire, Badenoch &amp; Strathspey</i></p> <p><i>New planting of mixed productive species, management and enrichment of existing woodlands</i></p>
<b><i>THEME 5 – INFRASTRUCTURE/ LOCAL PROCESSING</i></b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Improve industry networks</i></li> <li>• <i>Identify priority road and bridge improvements</i></li> <li>• <i>Increase rail usage</i></li> <li>• <i>Increase ship barge usage</i></li> <li>• <i>Establish local woodfuel schemes and supply chains</i></li> <li>• <i>Expand local and value added processing and marketing capacity</i></li> </ul>	<p><i>Forestry and Timber Association, Timber Transport Group, Forest Industries Cluster Group, FCS, HIE, HC</i></p> <p><i>Timber Transport Fund</i></p> <p><i>Timber Transport Fund</i></p> <p><i>Freight Facilities Grant</i></p> <p><i>FCS/HIE/HC</i></p> <p><i>HIE/FCS/CWA/FTA</i></p>

**[INSERT APPENDIX 2 (TABLE OF STRATEGIC CONSTRAINTS AND OPPORTUNITIES)]**

### **APPENDIX 3:**

#### **WATER BODIES AT RISK FROM DIFFUSE POLLUTION**

*Twelve water bodies in Highland are identified by SEPA as being at 'significant risk' from diffuse pollution due to pressure from forestry, harvesting and related service activities. In accordance with the Forest and Water guidelines, a 20 metre 'buffer' around the following water bodies has therefore been identified in the Highland Forest and Woodland Strategy as a primary constraint:*

1. *Loch Shiel*
2. *Loch Shin*
3. *Loch Veyatie*
4. *Loch More*
5. *Sleach Water (outflow of Clar Loch to inflow of Loch More; tributary from outflow of Lochan Ealach More)*
6. *Loch Urigill*
7. *River Moriston (outflow of Loch Loyne to River Moriston confluence)*
8. *Loch Ashie*
9. *Allt nan Ramh (Duartmore fish farm to the sea)*
10. *River Enrick (Loch Ness to Loch Meiklie)*
11. *River Enrick (Loch Meiklie to Allt Seanahbaile)*
12. *Loch Sgamhain*

**APPENDIX 4:**

**LIST OF ORGANISATIONS REPRESENTED ON THE IFS TECHNICAL GROUP**

*Highland Council*

*Forestry Commission Scotland*

*Scottish Executive Environment and Rural Affairs Department*

*Scottish Natural Heritage*

*Tilhill Forestry Ltd. (representing private sector interests)*

*UK Wood Processors Association*

*Deer Commission for Scotland*

*Highlands & Islands Enterprise*

## **APPENDIX 5: GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS**

<i>AGLV</i>	<i>Area of Great Landscape Value</i>
<i>CAP</i>	<i>Common Agricultural Policy</i>
<i>CCS</i>	<i>Crofters Commission for Scotland</i>
<i>CNPA</i>	<i>Cairngorm National Park Authority</i>
<i>CWA</i>	<i>Community Woodland Association</i>
<i>DCS</i>	<i>Deer Commission for Scotland</i>
<i>EIA</i>	<i>Environmental Impact Assessment</i>
<i>ESC</i>	<i>Ecological Site Classification</i>
<i>FCS</i>	<i>Forestry Commission Scotland</i>
<i>FDP</i>	<i>Forest Design Plan</i>
<i>FE</i>	<i>Forest Enterprise</i>
<i>FHN</i>	<i>Forest Habitat Network</i>
<i>GIS</i>	<i>Geographic Information System</i>
<i>HC</i>	<i>Highland Council</i>
<i>HFF</i>	<i>Highland Forestry Forum</i>
<i>HFWS</i>	<i>Highland Forest and Woodland Strategy</i>
<i>HS</i>	<i>Historic Scotland</i>
<i>IFS</i>	<i>Indicative Forestry Strategy</i>
<i>LA</i>	<i>Local authority (generic term)</i>
<i>LBAP</i>	<i>Local Biodiversity Action Plan</i>
<i>LCA</i>	<i>Land Capability for Agriculture</i>
<i>Natura</i>	<i>The EU initiative which identified SAC's and SPA's</i>
<i>NHFT</i>	<i>North Highland Forest Trust</i>
<i>NNR</i>	<i>National Nature Reserve</i>
<i>NSA</i>	<i>National Scenic Area</i>
<i>PMA</i>	<i>Popular Mountain Areas [originally identified by the Countryside Commission for Scotland in report of the same name]</i>
<i>RICS</i>	<i>Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors</i>
<i>RSPB</i>	<i>Royal Society for the Protection of Birds</i>
<i>SAC</i>	<i>Special Area of Conservation</i>
<i>SDD</i>	<i>Scottish Development Department</i>
<i>SEERAD</i>	<i>Scottish Executive Environment and Rural Affairs Department</i>
<i>SEPA</i>	<i>Scottish Environment Protection Agency</i>
<i>SFGS</i>	<i>Scottish Forestry Grants Scheme</i>
<i>SFS</i>	<i>Scottish Forestry Strategy</i>
<i>SNH</i>	<i>Scottish Natural Heritage</i>
<i>SNW</i>	<i>Scottish Native Woods</i>
<i>SOI</i>	<i>Sunart Oakwoods Initiative</i>
<i>SPA</i>	<i>Special Protection Area [for birds]</i>
<i>SSSI</i>	<i>Site of Special Scientific Interest</i>
<i>UKBAP</i>	<i>UK Biodiversity Action Plan</i>
<i>UKWAS</i>	<i>UK Woodland Assurance Scheme</i>
<i>WGS</i>	<i>Woodland Grant Scheme [now superceded by SFGS]</i>
<i>WIAT</i>	<i>Woodlands In and Around Towns</i>
<i>WTS</i>	<i>Woodland Trust Scotland</i>

## **APPENDIX 6: BIBLIOGRAPHY**

*Highland Regional Council (1994): Highland Region Structure Plan 1990 – Alteration no. 1 (Forestry)*

*Scottish Natural Heritage (1996-99): Landscape Character Assessments for Caithness & Sutherland, Ross & Cromarty, Lochaber, Moray & Nairn, Inverness District; Ben Alder, Ardverikie, and Creag Meagaidh; Skye & Lochalsh, Cairngorms, Inner Moray Firth*

*The Scottish Office Development Department (1999): Circular 9/1999 – Indicative Forestry Strategies*

*Scottish Executive (2000): Forests for Scotland – the Scottish Forestry Strategy*

*The Highland Council (2002): Forestry in Highland – Key Issues for the New Strategy*

*Forestry Commission Scotland (2005): Review of the Scottish Forestry Strategy*